

Chapter 2: Community Involvement

2.0 Public Involvement

In March of 2000, the Billings Gazette, a local newspaper, began a community visioning process with local leaders called Celebrate Billings 2000. They commissioned a telephone survey and a focus group that looked at these items for Billings in the future:

- What resources do we need?
- What are our major obstacles or threats?
- What do you think the Billings area will look like in 10 or 20 years?
- What do you want it to look like?
- What opportunities do we have?

At that time five major issues appeared. They were: 1) concern over economic development and jobs; 2) downtown development and sprawl; 3) affordable housing; 4) better transportation; and 5) lack of a vision for the community.

In October of 2000, a community forum was held by the Celebrate Billings group that reviewed the information gained from the telephone survey and the focus group. Those attending the forum were engaged in a problem solving process focused on the issues identified. Over 200 people attended the two day forum. The stated mission of the forum was “to identify any issues that impact growth and development in the greater Billings community and to determine what next steps to take in addressing those issues.”

During the same period and shortly before, the West Billings Plan was being completed. This effort involved 1,900 area residents and consisted of nine public meetings. A visual preference survey was also completed as part of this plan. Twenty-seven high priority issues were identified – many of them reflecting the concerns noted in the Celebrate Billings project.

In 2002, the Billings Gazette and other corporate sponsors, including PPL Montana, St. Vincent Healthcare, Deaconess Billings Clinic and Rocky Mountain College, went on to begin to develop some implementation strategies to the problems identified during the previous Celebrate Billings project. Called *Celebrate Billings: Working Together for our Community*, goals were developed under four areas: 1) Health and Public Safety; 2) Education; 3) Environment; and 4) Economic Development.

In 2001, the City-County Planning Department began the process of revising the Growth Policy. They began with the material generated by Celebrate Billings 2000 and by compiling new base-line information on the community, including Census 2000 information as it was released. Information gathered through recent planning activities, including the West Billings Plan, the Celebrate Billings projects and other opportunities for obtaining public comment was generally consistent.

To identify issues of concern to the community, the City-County Planning Department held a series of meetings with area residents targeting two types of groups: special interest groups, such as environmental groups, the development community, the business community; and geographical groups represented by neighborhood task forces. Beginning in early 2002, the Department made presentations at 31 separate venues and asked those attending for input on the issues already identified as well as any new issues they might want to raise.

The Department also developed an interactive computerized mapping survey that asked about land use development scenario preferences. Over 200 people took the survey. In addition, a web site was developed to allow a review of issues by neighborhood area along with a comment section available to those on line. While only a dozen comments were received, there were over 80 visits logged to the website.

A major community meeting was held on November 16, 2002 to review a draft of issues and goals for the Growth Policy. Titled "Picture This," the meeting contained a PowerPoint® presentation of issues with breakout meetings for each element in the Growth Policy. Over 60 people attended this meeting. Presentations on the draft goals and objec-

tives were made to the Billings City Council on December 16, and to the Board of County Commissioners on December 20, 2002.

A working draft of the Growth Policy was made available to the general public on December 30, 2002 in both hard copy and on line. The Planning Board held the formal public hearing on the Growth Policy on January 28, 2003. Taking into consideration the comments received at the public hearing, the Planning Board forwarded their recommendations to the Yellowstone County Commissioners and the Mayor and City Council of Billings (Resolution No. 03-01).

Both governing bodies reviewed the revised draft, published February 10, 2003, the recommendations by the Planning Board, and the final draft published May 8, 2003. The County Commissioners held a public hearing on the 2003 Growth Policy on July 8, 2003, adopted the resolution of intent to adopt on July 29, and adopted the policy on September 11, 2003. The City Council heard public comment and adopted the resolution of intent to adopt on July 14, and adopted the document on September 8, 2003. The town of Broadview adopted the resolution of intent to adopt on September 9, and adopted the document on October 14, 2003.

